

WASHINGTON REPORT

THE SHIP OF STAL

The President reshuffled his advisors in mid-November—not quite the same thing as assembling a new “team” as cliché-prone commentators would have it. Defense Secretary Schlesinger was sent packing and Donald Rumsfeld, a former House member from Illinois and, currently, a presidential adviser, was selected as his replacement. William Colby, who has been the target of the slings and arrows of two congressional investigations into the agency he heads, the CIA, was given his walking papers. His successor is designated as another former House member, George Bush of Texas, currently residing in Peking as our unofficial diplomatic representative to China. Dr. Kissinger, who has seemingly one more life than a cat, retained his post as Secretary of State, but an assistant of his, Lieut. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, was designated to replace Henry K as national security affairs advisor to the President at the White House. Elliot Richardson is to be brought home from Great Britain, where he is our Ambassador, to become Secretary of Commerce, in place of Rogers Morton—the fourth Cabinet position to which Richardson has been named since the Republican party won the White House eight years ago.

It is questionable whether the maneuver will generate better teamwork on behalf of Gerald Ford, in his capacity as President and (he presumes) as his party's presidential candidate. It doesn't point toward more capable handling of the energy, economic and Middle East problems. Certainly, the manner in which the changes were made known to the public augurs poorly. The changes in assignments were leaked in bits-and-pieces by those antagonistic to them. The President was not amused. This led one observer to suggest that the whole affair is faintly reminiscent of a game restless children on rainy afternoons often resort to with playing cards—“52 pick-up.”

First of all, Mr. Schlesinger did not go gentle into that good night. Senator Jackson, who shares Mr. Schlesinger's distaste for the Soviet Union, learned from someone about the dismissal within hours after the Defense Secretary had been told by the President he was no longer wanted. Then, a few days later, the House Committee on Intelligence Gathering Activities was given to understand that approximately a year ago Mr. Schlesinger had written a letter to the White House requesting a meeting of the National Security Council to discuss his belief that the Soviet Union had committed four violations of the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitations Agreement (SALT). The White House now maintains that the Schlesinger letter has been “destroyed or lost.” The House Committee, chaired by Representative Pike of New York, then met and by overwhelming votes cited Dr. Kissinger three times for contempt on grounds he had refused to produce certain materials relating to the purported SALT violations by the Soviet Union and also to covert CIA operations.

Then, Senator Church, not easily given to public displays of anger, denounced the President's selection of Mr. Bush to be CIA director on grounds it would place a former national chairman of a (Republican) political party “at the head of a highly sensitive intelligence agency.” The Rumsfeld nomination received prompt unanimous approval by the Senate Armed Services Committee, but Church's view of the Bush nomination seems to have no little support in the Senate, if for no other reason than he is chairman of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. Another reason is the surly mood toward Ford on behalf of many Democrats in the Senate that is evidenced in several ways; for example, within a two-week period in October, Democratically controlled committees rejected three nominations submitted by the President.

The Bush nomination will get even messier. Again, in part, because of the role Church will play. Administration supporters undoubtedly will charge that Church's presidential ambition is an element in his attack on Bush. Others who share Church's distress at actions of intelligence-gathering agencies of the federal government—the National Security Agency among others, as well as the CIA—have been critical about his conduct as chairman of the investigatory committee. Seymour Hersh, the major investigatory reporter of the *New York Times*, who first made public some of the CIA's misdeeds last December, was asked to put aside his writing a book and do a piece about the effectiveness of the 11-member Church committee, scheduled to expire in three months. Hersh's subsequently published article left an impression that the Church committee hadn't laid a glove on the CIA, as the heavyweight champ's manager always insists to reporters. Outspoken staff members of his committee left a self-serving impression, reflected in turn in the